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C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 007946

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SUBJECT: PARAS, FARC, AND CORRUPTION LOSE GROUND IN LOCAL ELECTIONS

REF: A. BOGOTA 7746

[1](#)B. BOGOTA 6745

Classified By: Political Counselor John Creamer - Reasons 1.5 (b, d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. The results of October 28 local elections saw ex-paramilitaries and their political associates lose ground. The paramilitary demobilization created new political space, with the press actively exposing candidates with para ties. Still, some candidates linked to jailed para-politicians won, most notably in Cordoba and Sucre. Races were largely decided on local issues, but Uribista coalition parties won a majority of governorships. The leftist Polo Democratico won 1.2 million more votes than in 2003, but did not translate those votes into major wins except in Bogota. Electoral officials saw few signs of Chavista money or support. The GOC made gains in preventing vote buying and traditional corruption, especially on the north coast. End summary.

Para Regional Influence Battered

[1](#)2. (U) In many regions where paramilitaries previously dominated local politics, the influence of ex-paras was severely weakened in the 2007 elections. In former para redoubts such as Cesar, Santander, and Bolivar departments, candidates with well-known ties to para-politicians lost. In Cesar, Cristian Moreno, who was forced to withdraw as gubernatorial candidate in 2003 under threats from paras, beat a candidate supported by the local para-connected elite. In Bolivar, reformist candidates took the governor's and mayoral races respectively, defeating candidates linked to para-politicians. Indicators of para-influence--including large numbers of un-contested races, huge turnout and lopsided votes in specific precincts, and large numbers of unmarked ballots --all fell sharply compared with the 2003 elections.

[1](#)3. (C) The media and human rights groups exploited the new political space created by the paramilitary demobilization and the jailing of former-para leaders to aggressively investigate and expose candidates with para-ties. Semana magazine political editor Alejandra Villamizar told us, "the tide has turned, and the media is not afraid to expose those people anymore." Two of the most vocal critics of the

para-politicians, Leon Valencia and Claudia Lopez publicly said after the elections that the results represented a blow to the former-paramilitary political structures.

¶4. (U) Candidates with para ties were not all defeated. In Cordoba and Sucre, where the para movement began, candidates won the governor's and key mayor's races with the support of politicians jailed in the para-political scandal. Most notable was the narrow victory of Jorge "Tuto" Barraza in the Sucre governor's race, who won with the support of jailed ex-senator Alvaro Garcia. There were widespread reports of vote-buying and other irregularities in Sucre.

¶5. (U) Violence from armed groups as well as overall violence was minimal on election day (Ref A), though there were scattered protests that turned violent in the days after the vote. Twelve Registrar's offices were attacked by supporters of unhappy losers in rural areas of 12 departments--with one person killed in Cienega del Oro, Cordoba.

Uribe Coalition Fared Well

¶6. (U) The elections revolved around local issues and cross-party alliances, and the results did not represent a "referendum" on President Uribe. Still, Uribista coalition parties won half of the governor's races, and 558 mayoral races out of a total of 1099 races countrywide. In comparison, the opposition Liberal Party won 206 mayoral races. The traditional Conservative Party saw the best coalition result, with 240 mayoral candidates elected. The U Party and Cambio Radical won 123 and 112 mayoral races, respectively.

Left Consolidates--Little Chavez Influence

¶7. (C) Candidates of the leftist Polo Democratico Party won at least 1.2 million more votes than in 2003, but did not see those votes translate into significant additional wins; only 20 Polo mayoral candidates were elected. The two biggest Polo victories were for Samuel Moreno in the Bogota mayoral contest (the most important race in the elections), and Antonio Navarro Wolff for governor of Narino. Polo, which remains riven by internal rivalries over security and relations with the armed left (Ref B), refused to form local alliances which limited their ability to compete with better-organized parties. Observers say Polo's relatively poor results nationwide will hurt its ability to build a national structure prior to the 2010 presidential elections.

¶8. (C) In the eastern Venezuela border region and in Valle de Cauca and Cundinamarca, GOC coalition party officials claimed prior to the elections that Venezuelan money and support had entered local campaigns. Still, national and local elections officials and members of Congress, who previously said they were worried about possible Chavez interference, told us most Polo campaigns were run on tight budgets and with no obvious external support. They saw little Venezuelan interference beyond "Chavista" rhetoric from some of the farthest-left candidates.

"Traditional" Corruption Takes a Hit

¶9. (C) The GOC made major strides in combating traditional vote buying and influence peddling. In Atlantico, where vote buying was an open secret, former-senator and machine politician Jose Name lost to Liberal Party candidate Eduardo Verano. El Tiempo called the unexpected result the most significant defeat for electoral fraud in memory. Registrar Juan Carlos Galindo implemented several anti-fraud measures, including refusing to provide census data to campaigns (used to stuff ballots and buy votes), transferring local election

officials and replacing them with independent outsiders, and personally monitoring the Atlantico elections. Senior politicians predicted that stopping Name after 37 previous triumphs would be "almost impossible." Commentators hailed the result as an historic victory for transparency in Colombia--and for Galindo.

Brownfield